

“Looking for Justice?”—Isaiah 51:5

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Looking for Justice?”, is Isaiah 51:5 → *My righteousness draws near, My salvation has gone out, and My arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for Me, and for My arm they wait.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“It just isn’t fair!” This statement reflects the desire for justice, whether made by a little child or an adult. When people encounter so many injustices in life the search for true justice seems an illusive mystery at times. Where do survivors of a mass shooting find justice for their loved ones when the shooter kills himself in the process? How do people perceive justice when it appears that the criminal has more rights and protection than those who are victimized in the crime? “It just isn’t fair!”

In our text God talks about justice within the context of His *salvation* and *righteousness*. The people to whom Isaiah spoke this Word of comfort and hope from the LORD were living in exile in the land of Babylon. They brought this situation upon themselves by continually refusing to recognize their sin in God’s sight, repent and submit to His Will and Word in their lives. Amidst their

looking for justice the LORD tells them to **place their faith in His power** to bring about justice **in His way!**

When it comes to justice, people get things mixed up much of the time and fail to see the more needed justice in their lives. People will look to politics to cure the tide of injustice, demanding more control through policies and laws in an effort to make life more fair and equitable. Sometimes a person will take up a “cause,” believing it is the only right way to achieve justice and save others. The call for justice from a completely human perspective is the desire to be treated “fairly” based upon standards of “fairness” developed by each individual. It is very relative to say the least.

When you pursue justice, righteousness and salvation on your own terms then it is not governed by God’s will and purposes for your life. Instead, it becomes motivated by your sinful, self-seeking desires for this life only. Justice is viewed as that which works for my benefit; righteousness is understood as that which I rationalize is right; salvation is sought as deliverance from my earthly misfortune for selfish gain.

One example which Jesus encountered reflecting this attitude toward justice is recorded in Luke 12:13-15. Jesus was approached by a man who said to Him, *Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.* Apparently he felt he was not being treated fairly by his brother in connection

to their inheritance. Jesus replied, *Man, who made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?* Jesus stated that it was not His place to figure out what was fair or unfair in terms of the things and possessions of this world. He re-directs our focus with His warning: *Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.* There is a different justice, righteousness and salvation with which we should concern ourselves in this life!

As the LORD spoke these words of promise to His people in our text He referred to more than simply His justice for them in their Babylonian captivity. It is very probable they would be thinking of His justice being accomplished by bringing His just vengeance upon their enemies and save them from their exile by bringing back to their home land. However, the LORD's justice is bound up in the *righteousness* and *salvation* which He would reveal to them **and accomplish for them!** He says in our text: *My righteousness draws near, My salvation has gone out, and My arms will judge the peoples.* The picture of His *arms* refers to the fact that it is going to happen **by God's power, in a perfectly righteous way, on His terms, in His time!**

Looking for justice has more to do with desiring to live in an eternal relationship with God than living in a relationship with the world around us. Because we are lost in our sin and cannot bring about God's justice

righteously, God accomplished this justice through His Servant on our behalf. Otherwise, in all “fairness,” we would all go to hell because that’s what we justly deserve for our sins! Rather, God wants us eternally in relationship with Him and His justice demands punishment for disobedience.

While the LORD spoke about the deliverance from the Babylonians which His servant would bring about—referring to Cyrus, king of Persia (cf. Isaiah 44:28; 45:1)—Isaiah continued to prophesy about another Servant Who would bring about an eternal deliverance also based on the LORD’s perfect justice. He described this Servant in Isaiah 53:4-8 as the One Who *has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his mouth . . . By oppression and judgment He was taken away . . . He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.*

A suffering Servant? That’s not the world’s idea of God’s powerful *arm* coming to bring about justice and salvation on our behalf. Wouldn’t it make more sense to take it out on the sinners who deserve the punishment? Wouldn’t it make more sense for God to let something bad happen to His

enemies so we could gloat over them saying, “Ha, you got yours!” Instead, He describes how His justice was satisfied by the suffering of His Servant, Jesus, **for us** on the cross because we can’t get it right on our own.

Notice Isaiah 51:4 says this Servant’s justice is *set . . . for a light to the peoples*. Not only was His justice accomplished for you but for everyone else as well! This happened in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! He revealed the *righteousness* and *salvation* which all people need. Simeon confessed this while holding the baby Jesus in his arms in the temple. He burst forth in prayer in Luke 2:29-32 → *Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of **all peoples**, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel*. This too is our confession when we return from experiencing Jesus’ presence and forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper! There He reveals His righteousness in the judgment that He experienced for our sins.

So . . . what does the LORD call you to do? He calls you to “listen up” and look for God’s justice **in Christ** for your eternal salvation now and seek His ultimate justice based upon His **enduring** work in Jesus Christ. When you *lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath* you will recognize the fleeting nature of it’s existence. *For the heavens will vanish like smoke, the*

earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner. This earth along with all the injustice and sin will not endure forever. Rather, the LORD's *salvation will be forever, and His righteousness will never be dismayed.* (cf. Isaiah 51:6)

Looking for justice from God's perspective means you repent of all your "injustices"—that is, your sins—against God and trust in His judgment upon your sins **in Jesus Christ!** It recognizes that even if you take up a just "cause" that you are still a sinner and your defense of that cause still does not meet up to God's perfect justice and "fairness." You admit your need for and cling solely to Christ's righteousness and salvation **on His terms.** Justice has been served perfectly for you and it has brought you a salvation and righteousness that endures forever!

Are you looking for justice? You will also need this new perspective of justice as you follow Jesus because you will be mistreated unjustly by others. Jesus said in Matthew 24:9 that unbelievers *will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for His name's sake.* Only by looking for justice in the Person & Work of Jesus will you find strength, peace and perseverance in this life as you wait patiently for His *arm* to bring about salvation and justice for eternity. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.